

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

ARTFORUM

New York: Marcus Leslie Singleton

Sarah Moroz | May 1, 2021



Marcus Leslie Singleton, *Standing On The Corner of Admiration & Opposition // Mid-Arrest*, 2021, oil on panel, 20 x 20". From the series "Bubble Paintings," 2020–21.

"Being a part of the circus is being born into this world," said Marcus Leslie Singleton regarding his first solo exhibition, "Circusland," at Turn Gallery in 2019. Across a series of twelve oil-on-panel works for this new show, Singleton traded the spectacle of acrobats and unicyclists for pointed yet subtle observations about contemporary Black life. Each of Singleton's "Bubble Paintings" (2020–21) features ovoids—which double as cocoons, apparitions, or entrapments—set against colorful backgrounds with willowy leaves and branches. The forms evoke the visual language of comics and graphic novels: a world within a world, but with Black figures inside. In the press release, Singleton articulates this formal choice as reflecting a kind of exhausting duplicity—"how you could be physically somewhere and mentally in a different space." Moreover, his approach highlights the anxieties of the African American experience, in which one is "policed and praised in the same breath."

Some scenes—two people clinking martini glasses, a woman sitting under a floor lamp—appear innocuous, a quality that's accentuated by the artist's deceptively "naive" painting style. The most overtly politically charged work is *Standing on the Corner of Admiration & Opposition // Mid-Arrest*, 2021, which features a man against an alarm-red background who is ostensibly surrendering himself to the police—despite their physical absence from the picture—by putting his hands behind his head. The hypothetical nature of a "Future Memory," as the show has been christened, conflates what is coming with what is past. But if history reverberates with oppression, inklings about tomorrow are understandably laced with unease.

[TURN GALLERY](#)

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